

Delores & Russel Miller's

Wisconsin Farmer

Billy Worm's Dahlias

by Delores Miller

Red dahlias are my favorite flowers. Each year I try to grow them, I buy good bulbs from Stein's, but they fail to thrive, rot, no flowers.

Many years ago, we were at Billy Worm's house in Oshkosh, he had a long row of red dahlias. Begged some and next spring he came with a brown grocery bag of roots. Planted them amongst the raspberry bushes, the only place Russell would let me have a little ground. They grew tall and straight and had thousands of red blossoms.

Regrettably, I dug them out, tried to dry them, only to have them rot in the basement. Nothing but mush in the springtime, when it was time to plant.

Then again I begged dahlia bulbs from Billy Worm. This kind gracious second cousin Billy (Cousin Ruby's oldest boy) brought me another brown grocery bag of dahlia bulbs.

Alas, again Russell wouldn't let me have a plot of ground to plant the dahlia bulbs. One giant clump he planted in front of the milk house, amongst the marigolds. Threw a bunch of dry fertilizer on the ground, trusted in the Good Lord to make them grow, and they grew and grew. The middle of July they began to blossom and blossom. At least

500 blossoms. People driving by on highway 'M' would stop and ask how I could get such a big rose bush to blossom. I had to tell them they were the magic dahlia bulbs from Billy Worm, and asked if I would give them a clump next year.

So then we still had some of Billy's dahlia bulbs left over. Russell being the lawn man didn't have room for a row of dahlias, but did dig up around the old silo on the West Side of the barn. Must have had old manure as a base, along with many rocks. We dug holes, stuck the bulbs in, and watered and left the rest up to the Good Lord.

They grew and grew. Strong winds tried to break them off, but we staked and tied, and even then they out grew the stakes, taller ones had to be pounded into the rocky ground. There must have been a thousand blossoms on these bushes.

We tried to take pictures, but sadly they do not show the beauty of all the blossoms. For 2 months we admired the dahlias, until, sadly a killing frost hit the Hortonville area on September 15, finishing off the dahlias.

Cut them down, dug out, spread in the barn for several weeks to dry. Knocked the dirt off, trying not to bruise the bulbs. Gently put several clumps in brown grocery bags and stored in our cool damp basement. Ten bags of dahlia bulbs. Maybe Billy's magic touch with dahlia bulbs will rub off on Delores Miller so she can share dahlia bulbs with her friends and neighbors.

Thanks Billy Worm.

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